

**YOUTH MEETINGS - 2023, JEHOVAH JIREH, SWINDON, UK
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

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1. In Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth. However, we find in verse 2 that the earth was void and without form. A) Was there a time between these verses? B) When was Lucifer casted down? C) Are there three heaven as Bible scholars predict?

A. In the Bible, we do not have any supporting passages to tell confidently that there was a time gap between verse 1 and 2 of Genesis chapter 1. Some people quote Isaiah 45:18 to support their view of such time of gap. However, it is not at all convincing to believe that there was a time gap based on Isaiah 45:18. Some other people, to comply with the science, propose this time gap theory. But the question is, “Do we need to really do that or follow that to accommodate science?”.

Moreover, the “time gap” imply that there was life and death between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1. If we consider that there was a time gap, then we need to answer questions like, “Was there sin and death in Genesis 1:2 before Genesis 3:15?”. Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5:12-14 that death came because of the sin of Adam. So, we cannot convincingly say that there was a time gap.

Importantly, there are many mysteries which God did not reveal to us. Therefore, it is honour to God, if we leave them as mysteries (Deuteronomy 29:29; Proverbs 25:2). If this question is not an hindrance to you in believing God and if it is not affecting your faith or salvation, then you can leave it as a mystery of God not revealed to us with a purpose.

B. The fall of Lucifer (Satan) from heaven is mentioned in the Bible symbolically in Isaiah 14:12–14 and Ezekiel 28:12–18. These two passages refer specifically to the kings of Babylon and Tyre. Satan was operating his powers behind those kings. Therefore, these scriptural passages describe why Satan fell, but they do not explicitly say when did that happen. However, Satan fell before he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden (Genesis 3:1–14). Satan’s fall, therefore, must have occurred somewhere after the time the angels were created and before he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Whether Satan’s fall occurred hours or days, or years before he tempted Adam and Eve in the Garden, Scriptures are silent about it (not revealed to us).

C. The word “heavens” in the Bible can refer to different domains or realms. Heavens can refer the earth’s atmosphere (or Planetary space) may probably be the “first heaven” (Deuteronomy 11:11; Psalm 104:12; Isaiah 55:10). Likewise the outer space (galactic space), where the galaxies are may be the “second heaven” (Psalm 8:3; Isaiah 13:10). But the heaven in general refer to God’s dwelling place, which is beyond the other “heavens,” a place known as the “third heaven” (Psalm 33:13–14; Isaiah 66:1; Matthew 6:9; Hebrews 7:26; Revelation 11:19), where Paul says that he went to (to the third heaven).

2. If God knew Adam and Eve were going to eat the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and cause so much of suffering to humanity, why did he not remove it?

- A. You may as well consider, “Why did God, knowing that His beloved son Jesus Christ is going to suffer a cruel death on the cross, still create human beings who would disobey Him?”. What would be your answer?

Actually, God wanted to reveal Himself and His great redemptive plan through the grand story of the Bible - creation, fall and redemption. We believe, that there is no death in the fruit as such but in disobeying God (God’s commandment not to eat that fruit) is death (Genesis 2:7; 1 John 3:4).

3. Did angels live on earth before human existence?

- A. Yes. Job 38: 4-7 says, “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Here “sons of God” are angels. They were created before the foundation of the world and were there worshipping God in heaven even before our earth and humans were created.

4. Could you please explain what does Ecclesiastes 7:16 mean?

- A. If we study the whole book of Ecclesiastes- we observe that the author finds no meaning in the present life with its strifes and struggles. He says everything under the Sun is “vanity”. In that context, overly righteous and overly wise mean:
- It is being righteous and wise in our own ways and in our own eyes. It is self righteousness as Paul said in Philippians 3: 9.
 - Such righteousness (our own righteousness) is like filthy rags before the Lord (Isaiah 64:6) .
 - It is fanaticism or religiosity or overly zealous which lead to mad devotion that hurts us and others. It depends on our own righteousness and wisdom rather than God’s. It is the righteousness of Pharisees as Jesus told in the sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:20).

However, we need the righteousness of God. We obtain the righteousness of God through the sacrifice of Jesus by faith in His finished work on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21) That imputed righteousness of God exceeds the righteousness of Pharisees. Christ is our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

5. Why did God kill Ananias and Sapphira for lying about the proceeds of the land? Why was there severe punishment for lying even in New Covenant of Grace?

- A. The Bible says in Acts 5:3-4 that “Satan filled their hearts to lie to Holy Spirit”. They “have not lied to men but to God” It’s not just lying, but giving place to Satan. Satan directly tried to work through them to damage the foundations of the first Church. It was the time that the first church was in formation, its foundations were being laid and the authority of the Apostles was being established, so any activity or involvement of Satan in such foundations of the Church cannot be compromised or tolerated. It is called God’s remedial judgment which is a warning to others (Acts 5:5b).

God gave them opportunity to repent or confess (Acts 5:8-9). They have not repented rather were inclined to lie and deceive the whole church.

Yes, God is indeed merciful and gracious in the period of the New Covenant. We are thankful to God that He is not punishing us now but rather giving us enough space for repentance. While God is gracious, we should not forget that we are serving the Holy and righteous God (Hebrews 12:28).

6. How do believers reconcile or explain the story of God fighting with Jacob with the idea of all powerful and all knowing God? How can we address concerns that this story could be seen as insane or unbelievable by unbelievers?

- A. Wrestling here is not to overpower Jacob and it is not a fight or quarrel with Jacob. It is Jacob's nature striving with God while God was waiting to bless him. God patiently wrestled with Jacob till he was transformed. Man's fallen nature always strives with God's nature (Genesis 6:4). Here, God is working on Jacob till he surrenders and comes fully into the ways of God. God, who is all-powerful and all-wise, is concerned of the affairs of feeble man and involves in his matters. Even so, He is working in the life of Jacob. It is a picture where the transcendent God is stooping down to meet man imminently. This truth is amazing. Moreover, Jacob wrestling with God at Penuel also signifies the prayer life of a believer clinging on to the Lord or wrestling in prayer until God grants his or her petitions.

7. God could have trained Esau like Jacob, if He can anything. Feels unfair that God could choose Jacob, even though Esau was rightfully a firstborn son.

- A. God gave Esau an opportunity to inherit the blessings of Isaac and Abraham as a firstborn son. But, Bible says, Esau rejected the the birthright and despised the blessings of God (Genesis 25:34; Hebrews 12:16-17). Also, Bible says that Esau was a fornicator and a profane person.

Romans 9:13-16 deals with this aspect very clearly, informing us that God is not unrighteous in choosing Jacob and it was according God's sovereign authority (see Romans 9:20-21).

Importantly, in Christ, now everyone can avail God's eternal blessings (Galatians 3:28-29; Ephesians 1:4) through faith.

8. What does it mean by "an evil spirit from God" in 1 Samuel 18:10 and 1 Samuel 19:9?

- A. Evil spirit came to Saul only after the Spirit of God left him. In other words, when Saul was filled with the Spirit of God evil spirit could not bother him. This indicates clearly that those who indulge in envy or entertain evil, give place to Devil.

"An evil spirit from God" does not mean that the evil spirits are with Him. But it means that even evil spirits cannot do anything in the life of a child of God (King Saul in this case) who are in the realm of God, unless God gives them permission. Evil spirits also are under the authority of God when they are involved with the affairs of the people of God (see for example Job 1:12; 2:6).

Evil spirit did not trouble Saul continuously but intermittently. There was also gracious provision given to Saul to get relief through the music of David. There is no need for a child of God to fear evil spirits or their torment. "The One who is in you (God) is greater than the one who is in the world." 1 John 4:4.

9. I feel like we don't really have a choice because you either choose God or go to hell. So, where is the choice?

- A. Choosing the hell is also a choice, isn't it? As Moses placed before the Israelites (Deuteronomy 30:15, 19) life (good) and death (evil), all of us can choose either life (God) or death (hell). However, the Word of God encourages us to choose life (Deuteronomy 30:19). God's does not want anyone to perish but to He wants all to come in to the knowledge of Salvation (Ezekiel 18: 23; 1 Timothy 2:4). There is no other way to heaven than believing in Jesus Christ.

10. Why did God create human? Why is human necessary to God.

- A. God is love and he created humans to share His love. God is the Lord of Glory. He wanted humans to share His glory. In fact, God wanted humans to share His throne and many other blessings which we cannot comprehend with our limited knowledge (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). God wanted man to have dominion over all His creation and to take care of it (stewardship). The ultimate purpose of the creation or existence of human beings is to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7).

11. There are so many books from Bible that were removed. How do we know that the Bible has not missed?

- A. Determining the canon (books of the Bible) was a process carried out first by Jewish scholars (with respect to Old Testament books) and later by early church (believers) (regarding New Testament books). But it was by the divine guidance the biblical canon was finally formed. The Old Testament contains the Law of Moses also called Pentateuch, the Prophets and Psalms. There is no dispute or doubts on the inclusion of the 39 books in the Old Testament. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself referred to the Scriptures (Luke 24:44). However, regarding 27 New Testament books, important principles were followed establish the authenticity of the books which could be included in the Biblical canon.

Important criteria in including a book in the New Testament,

- The author of the book was an apostle of Jesus Christ or an associate of an apostle.
- The book received apostolic approval and the approval of the early church.

As the process of canonisation of the present Bible is divinely guided, the Bible is complete giving whole counsel and revelation of God. Therefore there is no "missing" matter in the Bible and message of God is complete in it.

12. In Acts 15, Paul and Barnabas split over John Mark, whether they should bring him with them? After this Barnabas is never mentioned again. Was Paul wrong for this as Mark later became a useful vessel in writing the Gospel of Mark? I have heard before in a service that Barnabas was wrong and Paul was following God's will, please clarify.

- A. As it is recorded in the Bible (Acts 15: 37-41), “the contention between Paul and Barnabas was so sharp they departed asunder from one another”. This happened around AD 48.

First of all, we can't conclude from the text (Acts 15: 37-41) that they were split forever. Because, in 1 Corinthians 9:6, which was written much later than AD48 (after the events of Acts 15:37-41), Paul wrote “Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?”. Paul and Barnabas were reconciled according to Colossians 4:10. Also Paul and Mark were reconciled according to 2 Timothy 4:11.

Secondly, we cannot say that one between them is right and other is wrong. Just because Barnabas is not mentioned after Acts 15, we cannot say that Barnabas was wrong in choosing Mark and leaving Paul. Scriptures continue to talk about Paul's journeys. However It doesn't mean that all those who are not mentioned in the Scriptures were not following the God's will. Famous commentaries Matthew Henry wrote, “*Barnabas was peremptory that he would not go with Paul unless they took John Mark with them; Paul was as peremptory that he would not go if John did go with them. Neither would yield, and therefore there is no remedy but they must part...That the best of men are but men, subject to like passions as we are...I doubt there was a fault on both sides*”. The very word “contention” may imply that both were equally at fault. Another aspect to consider is that the entire phrase “the contention was so sharp between” is denoted by one word in Greek (**paroxusmos**) which mean “incitement” for good.

But, the important truth for us to note is that later Paul, Barnabas and Mark were reconciled. Paul said that Mark was his “fellow worker” (Philemon 1:24), and wrote to Timothy “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). Definitely Paul came to know how John Mark was changed over the years and that he became a faithful worker. Barnabas might have trained Mark and helped him to mature in his spiritual journey so that he could later write the Gospel.

13. Why did Jesus speak in Parables?.

- A. Parable means throwing something in parallel - it means revealing heavy truths (or profound truths) using earthly examples. Simple and easy to understand earthly stories and examples are thrown in parallel to heavy truths to understand them which were kept as secrets from the foundations of the world (Matthew 13:35). This is the first reason as to why Jesus used parables. Parables are hidden truths.

Secondly, the parables are meant for those who have “ears to hear” that is for those who are desiring to know them (Matthew 13;11). Many people heard parables of Jesus but refused to believe Him, for them these truths were hidden because of their dull hearts and because they had no eagerness to hear God's things just as it is written “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, And seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them” (Matthew 13:10-17).

Thirdly, parables are timeless truths. The truths of parables have applications and appropriateness to the people of all ages.

14. What is trinity? How do I explain this to my muslim friend?.

- A. Although the word “Trinity” is not found in the Holy Bible, its is implied throughout it (e.g. Genesis 1:28; Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:16; 2 Corinthians 13:14 and so on). The doctrine or teaching of Trinity was first used by Tertullian (AD 160–225) and later was confirmed by the Council of Nicea in AD 325.

The doctrine of Trinity says “One God eternally exists as three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. In other words, God is one in essence and three in person. The doctrine of Trinity has three crucial truths: a) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, b) each Person is fully God and c) there is only one God.

Any example to illustrate Trinity must not violate the three tenets;

- a) **Distinction** (Not the same person in three modes) - God is three persons (Matthew 3:13-17),
- b) **Deity** (with equal honours) - Each person is fully God (Philippians 2; Acts 5:3-4),
- c) **Unity** (not three Gods) - One God in three persons (Mark 12:29).

Actually, no one example can sufficiently explain “Trinity” without violating the above three truths. Therefore, Trinity is incomprehensible to the human wisdom and therefore cannot be explained in human words.

The doctrine of Trinity is established to protect the believers from false teaching which deny the deity of Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah Witness group advocates that Jesus Christ is a created being and the Holy Spirit is not a person. Mormons say Jesus is a preexistent sprit like us, he attained to Godhead, so one day we must also attain. Hinduism says many gods which are modes of same God (one God appearing in many forms of gods). One of the greatest obstacles in winning Muslims to Christ is their refusal to believe the the deity of Jesus Christ. They do not accept that Jesus is Christ is God. Since Trinity is incomprehensible to the human wisdom and therefore cannot be explained in human words, we can tell anyone exactly as God revealed Himself in Bible that "God is one God who eternally existed in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".

15. In some churches, they speak in tongues, what does Bible say about it and why don't we have that practice in our church?

- A. What does Bible says about speaking in tongues? - On the day of Pentecost on which the church was born and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested (Acts 2: 1-13), the disciple spoke in tongues, the spoken languages by the people present in Jerusalem at that time (see Acts 2: 6-8, 11).

First of all, speaking in tongues was the fulfilment of the prophecy as Peter stated in Acts 2: 17-18 and it is the manifestation of the work of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of repentance and salvation at that time (Acts 2: 37-39). Later apostle Paul wrote, in connection to the proper use of the spiritual gifts, that tongues are sign

unto the unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14: 42) but not for the believers. Further he wrote that it edifies only the individual who is speaking in unknown tongue but speaking in tongues does not edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:4). The Bible therefore does not encourage the practice of speaking in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:9) as it does not edify the church.

Secondly, speaking in tongues is not evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit - During the early days of the first church we see that people who were filled with the Holy Spirit spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4, 10:44-46, and 19:6). But later on, thousands of people believed in Christ but nothing is said about speaking in tongues (Acts 2:41, 8:5-25, 16:31-34, 21:20).

There is a wrong teaching that advocates speaking in tongues is a sign of receiving Holy Spirit which is a proof for salvation. It is a wrong teaching, because every saved person is not expected to speak in tongues as seen clearly in 1 Corinthians 12: 29-30. Scriptures tell us that we are saved by grace through faith and the salvation experience is because of the work of the Holy Spirit and we have received the Holy Spirit at the same time of the new birth (1John 2:27).

16. I try so hard to be a believer but I keep failing, I think it's really hard to be a believer in this age with full of temptations. How can I as a human deny my desires and make myself okay to follow God even though I find it very dull to live according to God's way?.

- A. As long as we are in the flesh and the sinful nature exists in us, we make mistakes and fall. No one can attain to sinless perfection while living on the earth and in flesh. Bible says in Isaiah 40: 30, *Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.* But, we should not take it as an excuse or a licence to commit sin. We serve the victorious God who gives us strength, *"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength"* Isaiah 40:30. You need to sincerely desire the victory over habitual sins to receive the strength as Isaiah 40:31 says, *But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

Whenever you fall you remember to recite Micah 7:8. Also, when you fall you need to repent and return to the Lord. Your repentance should involve three things (Proverbs 28:13): a) Do not cover your sins before the Lord, b) confess them and c) forsake them to receive the mercy of the Lord. The Lord who forgives and does not condemn us also says not to sin again (John 8:11; 1 John 2:1). If we sin we have an advocate with God, Jesus Christ our propitiation (1 John 2:2). The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ forgives all our sins, if we confess (1 John 1:7, 9).

Besides, the power in the efficacy of the Blood of Christ, the Lord has given us the power of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to have victory over habitual sins; the power of the resurrection of Christ or the newness of life in Christ to submit the members of our bodies for righteousness; the power of the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that strengthens us to lead a sanctified life after the salvation.

Nowhere in the Bible we see that following God's way is like living a dull life. There is definitely joy in following the Lord.

17. I believe in God, but I have never encountered Him in my life or experienced him in any sort of form. What should I do?

- A. First of all, encountering God does not necessarily mean seeing or hearing Him directly or visibly. You can encounter God in various ways. For example you can hear His voice in His Word, the Holy Bible or when you hear people of God sharing it. You can encounter God in His work, the creation. Moreover, accepting Jesus Christ as your personal saviour is to be done by "faith" not through any visible encounter. And the life after salvation also is to be lived by "faith" (1 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 3:11). Some people experience the deliverance from sinful habits, sickness and from the possession of evil spirits. Some other people believe in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and for the salvation from the eternal judgement of hell fire. God may work in different ways in the life of an individual. In any case, the biblical order is, first "believing" and then "seeing" the God works (John 11:40).

As you believe in Him already, continue in your faith.

18. What happens to people with Alzheimer's disease or dementia and other mental issues or disabilities?

- A. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:29-39), this includes all mental challenges. Yeah, Alzheimer's disease is the number one cause for dementia. Dementia is a symptom of aging.

Psalm 71 which is a prayer for old age, is an example of a biblical response to ageing with mental challenges such as dementia (Psalm 71:9). God will be our refuge from the womb (Psalm 71:6); in young age (Psalm 71:5) as well as when in the old age or when strength fails (Psalm 71:9, 18).